



Northwestern University Eczema Care & Education Center

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Dilute Bleach Baths

This section is a work in progress dedicated to learning about Eczema.

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Bacteria on the skin may make eczema worse and lead to infection. This simple formula makes for an anti-bacterial bath that is even gentler than a swimming pool and usually does not sting even when there is some open skin.

STEPS:

1. Fill a bathtub with warm (not hot!) water (about 40 gallons).
2. Pour 1/4 to 1/2 cup of common liquid bleach into the water.
3. Completely mix the added bleach in the water.
4. Soak in the chlorinated water for about 10 minutes.
5. Rinse the skin well with warm, fresh water at the end of each bath. You may use a gentle cleanser as well.
6. Gently pat the skin dry.
7. Apply the prescription creams or ointments or the moisturizer as directed while the skin is moist.
8. Repeat bleach baths 3 to 5 times per week or as prescribed by your doctor.

To make a smaller amount, such as in a 4.5 gallon bucket:

STEPS:

1. Fill a bucket with warm (not hot!) water (about 4 gallons).
2. Pour 1/2 teaspoon (tsp) to 1 teaspoon (tsp) [2.5ml to 5ml] of common liquid bleach into the water.
3. Completely mix the added bleach in the water.
4. Soak or use a cloth to gently wash the skin for about 10 minutes.
5. Rinse the skin well with warm, fresh water. You may use a gentle cleanser as well.
6. Gently pat the skin dry.
7. Apply the prescription creams or ointments or the moisturizer as directed while the skin is moist.
8. Repeat 3 to 5 times per week or as prescribed by your doctor.

*NOTE: For many it is easier to do the bath and probably safer since errors in dilution are much more significant with smaller volumes. If there is any stinging, irritation or pain, stop immediately and wash with copious amounts of clear water. To be used only under supervision of your health care provider.

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Bleach Baths

Itching, scratching and the immune dysregulation of atopic dermatitis lead to an increased risk of infection from superficial skin flora, especially *Staphylococcus aureus*. One technique that can help decrease the number of infections and possibly reduce the need for antibiotics in patients with eczema is called "Bleach Baths." Here are our simple recommendations:

Explain to the patient that swimming pools are chlorinated to help cut-down on microbes living in the water. Together, you will "**make your very own swimming pool**" right in the bathtub! This special water will help cut down on microbes on the skin.

STEPS:

1. Start by adding lukewarm water to fill a tub for a normal bath (about 40 gallons).
2. Put 1/4 to 1/2 cup of common liquid bleach (for example, Clorox) into the bath water. Check the bleach bottle to make sure that the concentration of bleach (also known as sodium hypochlorite) is about 6%.
3. Completely mix the added bleach in the water. This should create a solution of diluted bleach (about 0.005%), which is just a little stronger than chlorinated swimming pool water.
4. Soak in the chlorinated water for about 10 minutes.
5. Thoroughly rinse the skin clear with lukewarm, fresh water at the end of the bleach bath.
6. As soon as you're finished rinsing off, pat dry. Do not rub dry as this is the same as scratching!
7. Immediately apply any prescribed medication and/or emollients.
8. Repeat bleach baths 2 to 3 times a week or as prescribed by the physician.

The following restrictions may apply:

- Do not use undiluted bleach directly on the skin. Even diluted bleach baths can potentially cause dryness and/or irritation.
- Do not use bleach baths if there are many breaks or open areas in the skin (for fear of intense stinging and burning)
- Do not use bleach baths in patients with a known contact allergy to chlorine.